

THE GIFT OF THE SEA

By Vivian H. Brewer.

"I don't believe that we are ever going to be married, Frank," said Maisie Lester, looking sadly at her fiancé. There were tears in her big gray eyes, and Frank Rhodes felt a sudden sting of shame as he perceived them.

He was twenty-eight and Maisie twenty-five, and they had been engaged four years. They ought to have been married long before, but Frank



"Yes, I Dropped That!"

was what his folks called a "ne'er-do-well." He had never placed his foot upon the first rung of the ladder of success. He had been a clerk in half a dozen offices, but he wholly lacked the elements that make for financial affluence.

Had he been a poet he might have made his way, for poetry is said to be a fairly lucrative calling. But he was not even that—he was a composer by choice. He knew that the

present generation would never understand his work; he wanted nothing but to have a quiet home of his own where he could farm and write his melodies undisturbed. And Maisie had that passionate longing for a country life that city-bred people feel. She was a stenographer, and between them they made exactly twenty dollars a week. Frank would have married her on that, but Maisie had enough worldly wisdom to refuse.

"No, my dear," she had said, "unless you can do something that will enable us to get our little farm we must remain unmarried. But I shall always be true to you," she added, and cried piteously. They were like two children and neither had the remotest hope of ever achieving what they had set their hearts upon.

Then Frank had had a wonderful idea. He would go West. What he was going to do in the West he did not know, but since the rainbow has a pot of gold at the far end of its arch he had a vague idea that somehow he would acquire a fortune in Nevada, Oklahoma or Oregon—he was not sure which. And on the following day he was to start for St. Louis, which was as far as his money would carry him. They had met on the beach—an ordinary, commonplace beach near the city, thronged by pleasure-seekers, but distressingly cold and barren in the winter season. It was to be their last meeting for years—perhaps for ever.

"I shall always be true to you, Frank," Maisie whispered again, and clung to him; and they kissed each other as passionately as lovers do who are to be sundered for an incalculable age. They sat down side by side and Maisie traced his initials in the sand with the point of her umbrella.

How child-like he was! she meditated. She stole a glance at the long, curly hair that rimmed his head under his soft hat. Poor Frank! Dearly as she loved him, Maisie knew that he would never amount to anything.